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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000169

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SUBJECT: PANAMA: KOSOVO STATEMENT RELEASED BY COUNCIL ON
FOREIGN RELATIONS

REF: PANAMA 126

Classified By: POLCOUNS Brian R. Naranjo. Reason: 1.4 (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Panama "imposes upon itself a position of neutrality that favors dialogue between the parties," Panama's National Council on Foreign Relations (CONAREX) in its press release on February 25. First VP and FM Samuel Lewis told Ambassador February 21 that he would convene this advisory council on February 25 to study the issue of recognizing Kosovo, to make a recommendation, and to "provide cover" for Panama's eventual recognition of Kosovo. CONAREX's statement, however, provides little -- if any -- cover for such recognition, but rather laments that "actual events did not follow the road" to a consensual agreement and notes that "peaceful co-existence among human beings above that of political-geographic interests." In light of the violent demonstrations in Belgrade and Banja Luka against international recognition of Kosovo, Panama is less likely now to recognize Kosovo soon. At a minimum, Panama will likely delay recognition until it no longer holds the presidency of the UN Security Council (UNSC). End summary.

CONAREX Statement

¶2. (U) Begin text of unofficial translation:

Council on Foreign Relations Examines the Topic of Kosovo
Panama, 25 February 2008

The First Vice President and Minister of Foreign Relations, Samuel Lewis Navarro, called today a National Council of Foreign Relations meeting to analyze the situation in Kosovo as the result of its unilateral declaration of independence.

The members of the Council praised the position taken by the government of Panama to call for caution in the management of these sensitive international topics because, since Panama is presiding over the UN Security Council, such a position "imposes upon itself a position of neutrality that favors dialogue between the parties."

"Panama maintains the position of promoting the direct dialogue between the parties with the help of European facilitators within the framework of the United Nations, based on Chapter VII of its Charter, because the solution

should not only be regional but should be framed with respect to the principles of the UN Charter," Lewis Navarro said.

As a result of our posture favoring dialogue, Panama has called for several meetings (Note: ostensibly in the UNSC) to analyze Kosovo. After Kosovo's declaration of independence, and upon "urgent" requests from the Russian and Serbian delegations, Panama held debates on February 14 and also on February 18, explained the Foreign Minister.

The following members attended this XVI National Council on Foreign Relations meeting where the Kosovo situation was discussed exclusively: Jorge Eduardo Ritter, Ricardo Arias Calderon, Eloy Alfaro, Nicolas Gonzalez Revilla, Gladys Bandiera and Juan David Morgan. Legislator Abraham Martinez attended as a special guest.

In a press release, Panama expressed that it would have preferred that, under the auspices of the international community, Serbia and Kosovo would have found a negotiated formula to address their differences. Panama had acted with determination to procure a consensual solution but current actions showed that such a path was not followed.

Before this reality, it is necessary that all of us give priority to peaceful co-existence among human beings above that of political-geographic interests, states the press release.

End text.

Comment

13. (C) During a stop at the MFA on February 19, DG for External Affairs Javier Bonagas told IO visitor Ambassador Rees that Panama was unlikely to recognize Panama before it stepped down from the UNSC Presidency at the end of February.

Ambassador quickly pushed back with Lewis on the same day noting that recognition in March would not be "soon after the Europeans," as previously promised; Lewis quickly disowned Bonagas' remarks, noting that they were his "personal view." On February 21, Lewis informed Ambassador that CONAREX would be convened to provide advice and more importantly political cover for Panama to recognize Kosovo "before the end of February." In retrospect, Bonagas was probably expressing Panama's true views very clearly. CONAREX's lackluster statement provides little "political cover" for the FM and indeed diminishes the likelihood that Panama will recognize Kosovo soon. The outbreaks of violent demonstrations, primarily in Belgrade but also in Banja Luka, have made a gun shy Panama even more hesitant to recognize Kosovo soon. Not wishing to upset anybody by recognizing Kosovo, Panama wants to wait until it can safely do so without drawing any attention. Embassy will continue to press Panama to recognize Kosovo soon.

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